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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates three issues vital to early childhood education: (1) sources of curriculum, (2) sources of financial support, and (3) the relationship between racism and compensatory education. "Natural" childhood and child development theories are discussed, and their use as a source of curriculum for young children is questioned, as is the use of intelligence tests. Sources of financial support have been federal programs, the public schools, and private owners. New to the field are corporate franchise and chain operations which have inherent dangers: use of standardized curriculum and procedure; the possibility that profit motive may cut costs at the expense of the children; and the freedom to be racially restrictive. Benefits may be innovativeness and independence from political pressure. The Kerner Commission recommendation that more preschool compensatory education programs be provided in black ghetto areas seems designed to make black children behave more like white, middle class children. The identification of the problem as being in the child is a confortable concept of disadvantagement for white group members. However, the problem may be in public school attitudes, which tend to perpetuate disadvantagement by providing inadequate educational experiences and by viewing the child through a negative set of expectations. (Author/NH)

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ISSUES AND REALITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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In a field as diverse and as innovative as early childhood education is today there are many issues that can be discussed. I have selected three to speak to this morning. These have been chosen as much because of my personal concerns as because of the vital nature of these issues in the field. Many other important issues exist, more than could even be inadequately covered in the assigned time. I am sure that next day's speaker will select other issues that he considers equally vital.

The three issues I have selected to investigate with you today are: (1) the sources of the curriculum of early childhood education, (2) the sources of financial support for the field, and (3) the relationship between racism and compensatory education.

The Sources of the Curriculum

During the past half dozen years a large number of innovative programs have been proposed for the education of young children. Each purports to provide the right kind of educational experience for young children. Each supports its contention that the experiences provided

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within it are best for young children. While many of the programs were originally designed for special subpopulations of children, such as the disadvantaged, the proponents of at least some of these programs have generalized the appropriateness of their curriculum to all young children. While some programs described as "new" are primarily modifications of existing practice, the difference between a number of innovative programs and traditional nursery kindergarten practice is great. Even greater than the difference in practice has been the difference in the sources of these curricula.

How does one create a curriculum? Let me define curriculum as the organized experiences provided for children in a school setting. One of the earliest identified sources of an early childhood curriculum was children themselves. If you read the work of Frederick Froebel or Maria Montessori, you will quickly note that both of these pioneers of early childhood education used their observations of children as the main source of their curriculum.

Froebel, for example, conceived of the relationship between mother and child as the most perfect human relationship. His observations of children and their parents became the source of his Mothers Plays and Songs, a set of games that kindergarten teachers were to play with their charges. Similarly, Dr. Montessori describes in her writing how she originally provided children with manipulative apparatus and allowed the children to play freely with this apparatus. As a result of her observations, Dr. Montessori was able to abstract what she considered to

be the key elements from the children's play. She then ordered these abstractions into her famous Montessori Method.

Many supporters of traditional nursery school practice as well as modern English Infant school educators support their curriculum by recourse to children's natural activities. Practitioners in both of these educational institutions may respond to questions about what they do to children by referring to the "natural" activity of children. Often when I asked the English Infant School teachers I visited last year how they determine what to do with the children, I was told that they (the teachers) were simply following the leads of the children. [The slogan "I teach children, not subjects," a slogan reminiscent of the days of the Progressive school in the United States, uses the same recourse to natural childhood.]

The use of "natural" childhood as the source of curriculum smacks of romanticism. Such educational arguments can be traced as far back as Rousseau. The ideal of the unsocialized savage whose best instincts are destroyed by the surrounding culture is echoed as much in Goodman's Compulsory Mis-education as in Emile. Educators who use such arguments take comfort in the feeling that they are not violating the child in any way but are rather "doing what comes naturally."

Unfortunately the arguments using natural childhood as a source of the curriculum do not hold up well. There is nothing natural about any school, even a preschool. Nursery classes and kindergartens cannot be

directly derived from the natural activity of children. The very nature of the educational process requires that if it is effective, the child ought to be different as a result of his experiences within it. The child should exit from the program in a less natural state than the one in which he entered it. All schools, as a matter of fact, are cultural contrivances to do things to children, to change them.

Looking more closely at the curricula contrived from the natural observations of children, one becomes aware of the selectivity of the observations and the uses to which these observations have been put. When one observes an object one must define certain attributes of the object as critical. This definition provides a focus for the observation and the descriptions that follow. Other attributes besides those observed may exist, but they are overlooked because they are considered uncritical. The purpose for which one is observing determines what one is looking at and what one will see. Thus, a young lady preparing for a date may consider the color and cut of a dress in her observations of that dress. The mother of the same young lady may observe the fabric and stitching with which the dress has been assembled. Ralph Nader might be more concerned with the flammability of the garment as well as its price, while a sociologist might be more concerned with the effects of the garment on the wearer and on outside observers. Who has seen the real garment?

In analysing the arguments about the natural activity of childhood as a source of the curriculum, one becomes similarly aware that the purposes of the observer or educational theorist often determines what is seen and the products of such observations are far from natural in nature. For few contemporary educators can fail to see the contrived nature of either the Froebelian kindergarten or the Montessori school. If one were to understand the curriculum determined by a Montessori, a Froebel or by other educational developers one must go beyond simple natural observation and identify the rationale for selecting the observations and using these observations in developing educational experiences for children.

A second curriculum source that has been used by early childhood educators has been child development theory. Generally two types of theory have been used. One has been Gesellian theory. This type of theory considers child development as primarily maturational. Children are studied to identify the process of the unfolding of childhood. As a result of Gesellian theory, children have been grouped by age in nursery-kindergarten classes and have been provided with experiences that are considered appropriate for their age level.

Arguments derived from Gesellian theory have been used to exclude inappropriate activities from the school life of children as well as to insure that appropriate experiences are provided. The argument that we must "protect the right of the child to be five" has often been

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heard when the suggestion has been made to include reading instruction in the kindergarten program. However, the nature of fiveness is difficult to determine for age norms do not adequately describe the range of heights, weights, skills, abilities, or any other attributes of children at any age. Nor would these attributes remain constant at all times for all persons in all cultures if they could be identified. Average heights and weights of children have risen in the last fifty years and will vary from one geographic area to another, not necessarily the result of natural differences, but rather the result of environmental differences. Other attributes of childhood will also vary as a result of environment, cultural as well as physical. What a child is at any level of development is to some extent a result of what a culture says he ought to be.

More recently the recourse to child development theory has used the work of Piaget as a source of the curriculum. Gesell is no longer as fashionable.

A number of recent projects aimed at enhancing intellectual development as the basis for creating specific curriculum for disadvantaged children. Lavatelli reports on a project she directed that aimed at developing a number of intellectual schema in children. These included one-to-one correspondence, classification and seriation. In the area of one-to-one correspondence, activities were planned that involved matching sets of objects that varied in color, size, shape, and number. Other

activities established correspondence between groups of objects and then had teachers ask children about the equality of the groups when physical correspondence was destroyed. Additional activities involved children in conservation of quantities.[1]

Feigenbaum has also described activities that nursery school teachers can use to teach conservation. The activities suggested include games using musical chairs and instruments, animal name cards, dolls, and carriages as well as activities similar to traditional Piaget tasks, e.g. pouring liquids into different shaped containers, and comparing the weight of different shaped lumps of play dough.[2]

Sonquist and Kamii described a Piaget-based curriculum for disadvantaged young children that was developed in Ypsilanti, Michigan, under the direction of David P. Weikart. This program uses the traditional activities and materials of the nursery school, but "in different ways and for different purposes." Using a Piagetian scheme of analysis, activities are designed to move children through levels of representation from the index level, to the symbol level, to the sign level. Relationships among objects are also taught, including grouping and ordering, as well

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1. Lavatelli, Celia Stendler, "A Piaget Derived Model for Compensatory Pre-School Education," in Joe L. Frost (ed.) Early Childhood Education Rediscovered. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968, pp. 530-544.

2. Feigenbaum, Kenneth, "Activities to Teach the Concept of Conservation," Young Children, Vol. 24, No. 3 (January 1969), pp. 151-153.

as relating objects and events in time and space. While a number of games and specific interactions are used, traditional activities such as dramatic play provide important sources of diagnoses and teaching.[3]

Is child development theory, Piagetian or otherwise, a legitimate source of the educational curriculum of young children? The "child development point of view" has been a popular point of view in early childhood education for many years. However, I seriously question the appropriateness of child development theory as a source of the curriculum.

Child development is a descriptive science. At its best it can tell us what is. Education by its very nature deals not with what is, but with what ought to be. Choices and preferences are involved in creating educational experiences that cannot be rationalized by recourse to child development theory. If anything, child development theory can provide us with useful information, often of a negative kind about what we cannot do to children at a particular point in their development if we want them to learn, or information about readiness stages for learning.

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3. Sonquist, Hanna D., and Kamii, Constance K., "Applying Some Piagetian Concepts in the Classroom for the Disadvantaged," Young Children, Vol. 22, No. 4 (March 1967), pp. 231-240.

Another questionable practice in the use of child development theory is the use of developmental tests as the basis for curriculum. The use of a Piagetian task, or an item on an intelligence test as a basis for selecting activities for children raises an issue which I should like to deal with at a later point.

Child development theory is only one form of psychological theory that has been identified by program developers as a source of curriculum; learning theories and theories of intelligence have also been used. Developmental theory deals with change in the human being over long periods of time. Learning theory attempts to account for short term change. The recourse to learning theory as a source of curriculum of early childhood has been manifest in several different ways. One way is through the admonition to develop behavioral objectives. Actually there is nothing psychological about the use of behavioral objectives, nor are objectives more profound because they are stated in behavioral terms. The translation of goals of the curriculum into behavioral objectives, however, allows for an easy evaluation of achievement.

Psychological processes are not directly observable; they must be inferred. Behaviors are observable. Psychologists often forget that the meanings of these behaviors must still be inferred. A psychologist may identify as a legitimate goal of nursery or kindergarten education the ability to attend to auditory signals. This might be translated

into the following criterial behavior: "The ability to sit still for ten minutes and listen to a story as part of a group." Whether or not a child is actually gaining meaning from the auditory environment is not directly observable. The relationship between sitting still and listening (which is certainly not a 1:1 relationship) has led the psychologist to list as his goal a behavior which might better represent conformity than attention.

Psychological theory focusing on behavior and behavior modification has determined the structure of a number of curricula in early childhood education. While short term change is easily observed and evaluated, there are seldom any attempts to study long term effects of these curricula. Psychological scientisms are often used in justifying these programs. In the final analysis such programs may be based as much on ultimate faith as are any of the more traditional programs. The use of psychologisms and the great emphasis on the evaluation of effectiveness without analyzing ultimate goals may, in the long run, obscure the ultimate consequences of these programs.

One other facet of psychology that is often used as the source of the curriculum is psychological testing. This is more practice than theory. Many of the programs in early childhood education are justified as a way of increasing intelligence. One way of judging the intelligence of children is through the administration and scoring of an intelligence test. Such test consists of items which purport to sample a broad range of intellectual behaviors in children. Each item achieves its

validity from the fact that it represents many other kinds of behaviors that might have been elicited from the total population of intelligent behaviors.

Since programs can demonstrate their effectiveness by having the children enrolled in them achieve higher scores on intelligence tests, it is easy for tasks taken from intelligence tests or for related tasks to become the content of the program. Justification for this approach to curriculum development often takes the form of an argument that suggests that since these items are selected as samples of intelligent behavior, having children practice these behaviors is the same as having children practice behaving in an intelligent manner. Such logic is devastating. But rote learning of responses to particular stimuli cannot be called intelligent behavior. Such distortions of psychological testing and curriculum development are not limited to the area of intelligence testing. They may take place in the realm of language development or in any other area where samples of behavior are mistaken for the total population of behaviors they represent.

While the area of psychological theory represents one area used in justifying curriculum proposals, it is by no means not the only source of justification used. Another source used popularly is the content of later schooling. "Reading readiness" is important because it prepares children for reading instruction. The readiness skills have no importance by themselves. Often certain kinds of organization are considered good for children because it prepares them for later school

expectations. The pressures of later life and of later schooling is heaped upon the child in anticipation of what is to come.

A caricature of such a justification is to be found in the Bereiter -Engelmann Program. The content of the program (reading, language, and mathematics) is important because it is required of children in primary grades. The organization also prepares the child for behaving appropriately for his school life ahead. The legitimacy of such a justification is questionable. Whether such preparation will offer a better chance to children later on is often unfounded.

One of the few long range studies of the effects of education, the Eight Year Study of Progressive high schools, demonstrated that children in open school situations did better than those from more restrictive school environments when they went to college. While extrapolation to a younger age level may not be appropriate, the study certainly raises some questions about the desirability of providing children with rigid early schooling as preparation for rigid later schooling.

Unfortunately, such recourse to later learning only obscures the concern for the sources of curriculum. For later school learning is not a goal in and of itself but is also considered a means to a goal. Using such a justification only pushes decisions about curriculum content back further. As it is, too little concern is given to the proper sources of the curriculum.

Dearden has suggested that the goal of education is "personal autonomy based upon reason." He describes this autonomy as follows:

> There are two aspects to such an autonomy, the first of which is negative. This is independence of authorities, both of those who would dictate or prescribe what I am to believe and of those who would arbitrarily direct me in what I am to do. The complementary positive aspect is, first, that of testing the truth of things for myself, whether by experience or by a critical estimate of the testimony of others, and secondly, that of deliberating, forming intentions and choosing what I shall do according to a scale of values which I can myself appreciate. Both understanding and choice, or thought and action, are therefore to be independent of authority and based instead on reason. This is the ideal.[4]

If we accept this goal as legitimate than of what use is psychological theory to the educator. For one thing psychological theory helps us determine ways of testing the effectiveness of a program in achieving the ideal. Secondly, knowledge of developmental processes can help us to order the activities we provide to children in terms of what can be of use to a child at a particular level of development and what activities might precede or follow others. Developmental theory becomes a tool for the analysis of curriculum, rather than a source of the curriculum, and the content of school programs must be recognized as products of the imagination of educators to be tested by psychological means, rather than as natural consequences of children's behavior, adult's thinking, or institutional organization.

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4. Dearden, R.F., The Philosophy of Primary Education. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, p. 46.

Sources of Financial Support

A second set of issues I wish to explore relates to the sources of financial support of schools for young children and the effects of these diverse sources. Elementary, secondary, and higher education are funded through public monies and are considered continuing services. Few government agencies are willing to support early childhood education in the same way. This has led to the separation of early childhood education from the rest of the educational enterprise. It has also forced many programs to be short term in nature.

Early childhood programs become projects based upon short term, often federal funds. The tentativeness of the support has led to an inability to attract the number of adequately prepared staff as well as to an often tentative commitment to education for the young child.

While the public schools have become involved in early childhood education to an unprecedented degree, they do not hold a monopoly on that field. The sponsorship of educational institutions of young children is diverse. A number of nursery schools and kindergartens are presently run by semi-retired little old ladies who love children. We are seeing an increased involvement of large business and industry in the field. Only recently the Performance Systems, Inc., Hasbro Toys, The Singer Co., and La Petite Academe, to name but a few are moving into the field of day care and nursery education. This is but the first of many franchise operations and chains of nursery schools and day care centers to be operated nationwide by large commercial and

industrial corporations. Commercial chains of nursery schools and day care centers will invade our field just as they have invaded the restaurant and motel field.

While there may be an advantage in having heavy financial support for the development of new schools, there are also some inherent dangers. The expansion of the franchise business in commercial areas is based upon the availability of a standard, clearly identifiable product everywhere in the United States. One Howard Johnson's motel is pretty much like all other Howard Johnson's motels, and a Dairy Queen cone tastes the same wherever you go. In addition, the franchise operation flourishes on the rationalization of the production system. Special recipes and formulas, prepackaged foods, specifically designed ovens allow relatively unskilled persons to prepare a reasonable product they could not create on their own. Standardization and rationalization of food products allows for guaranteed edibility, but one seldom finds a gourmet dinner available in a franchised restaurant.

Young children are not hamburgers. A standard curriculum and a standard procedure for handling all children cannot be considered good educational practice. A good school for young children, and indeed for all children, requires that a custom built curriculum be tailored for each child by the teacher; a curriculum based upon the individual child's strengths, needs and background. The danger of the franchise approach to early childhood education is that the handcrafting of

educational opportunity found in many fine schools may give way to the standardized pre-packaged educational curriculum.

Besides the fear of inadequate quality control, the intrusion of large corporations into early childhood education raises a number of other issues. For one thing when large corporations do bad they can do it on a massive scale. A single poor school can inflict damage only on a few. A major industry could harm many.

Some educators are fearful that the power of the large corporations will be used to force state agencies to lower standards for nursery schools and day care centers. When the profit motive is strong, it might force a move to keep costs down as low as possible, even at the expense of children. While most of us make our livelihood from children, few of us profit from children's service, nor could we increase our gains by holding back from children. While there are many principled corporations in the fields of business, a look at the nursing home industry demonstrates that when the profit motive is strong, operators exist who are willing to exploit the weak and the powerless. And young children are weak, powerless and often voiceless in our society. Increased vigilance in maintaining standards of quality will be needed as these new industrial agencies move into early childhood education.

While industrial involvement may present dangers to children, there may also be benefits. Industries moving into the field are not bound by tradition, nor do they have to be responsive to the political

pressures around them. New schools, though private in nature, may become innovative. Their youth may provide a degree of flexibility that will allow them to be responsive to children and to test out new ideas. They may also be a haven for racists.

With the courts forcing the desegregation of public schools in the South, instant private schools are being created to protect white children from the rulings of the courts. Private early childhood agencies may be similar havens. But racism can take place in public as well as private institutions. As a matter of fact there are those who suggest that the entire move towards preschool compensatory education ventures is racist in its consequences, if not in its intent.

Racism and Compensatory Education

Last year I was asked to write an article for the Illinois School Journal analyzing the Kerner Commission Report on Civil Disorders and the effects of the Report one year later from the point of view of early childhood education. The assignment forced me to read the Report in depth. The conclusions of the Report, which received some publicity, was that the basic problem of American society was the attitudes of white Americans towards black Americans.

At the end of the Report a series of recommendations were presented that were supposed to have been derived from the conclusions of the Report. In essence one set of recommendations was that more compensatory programs of preschool education ought to be provided in black ghetto areas. I have thought this recommendation through for

one year and have found no way to relate this recommendation to the conclusions of the Report except to suggest that the recommendation is designed to make black children behave more like white middle class children.

Differences between blacks and whites in our society and in our educational organizations have long been justified by recourse to arguments of inherited deficits. Blacks did not do well in society or in schools because their genes were different than whites. We still hear echoes of that argument today. For many sophisticated educators and psychologists the myth of genetic deficit has been supplanted by the myth of environmental deficit.

The very notions of disadvantagement and of compensatory education suggests a relationship in our society between inferiors and superiors. Evidence of this relationship can be found in job attainment, school attainment, family organization, and the results of psychological testing programs based upon scientific principles. The myth suggests that if we make blacks more like whites, if we give them comparable education, they will be able to attain at the same level as whites. Actually it does not work out that way. For even when black youths complete high school, they cannot command salaries as high as their white counterparts. Could it be that there are other forces operating?

The concept of disadvantagement is a comfortable one for white majority group members. We can identify differences between black and white, between rich and poor. These differences are related to

attainment in our society. These differences justify greater attainment for one group than for another. I remember hearing a group of program developers some years ago state that "the Negro child does not have a different language . . . he has no language at all." Sociolinguists today deny this position. The problem with this identification is that educators and, unfortunately, psychologists as well often conceive of cultural differences as pathological differences.

Conceiving of these differences as pathological may not only create individual problems for the child so labeled, but it may also blind educators to the other sources of problems. Once we have identified the problem as being in the child, why look further?

Perhaps, however, the problem is not in the child, but in the form of education provided for some children, as well as in the institutions that perpetuate that form of education -- the public schools. In recent years a rash of books have been published describing the dehumanizing effects of contemporary public school practices. Death at an Early Age, Our Children are Dying, and The Way Its Spozed to Be are examples of some. The School Children describes the same scene from a different point of view. If the schools are as bad as these books describe them, and some I have personally associated with earlier in my career were, then no amount of preschool compensatory education will make a difference. The cumulative deficit, the profile of normalcy, the sacredness of our institutions as they are, may be the source

of a series of relationships that perpetuates disadvantagement by providing children with wholly inadequate educational experiences and by viewing him through a negative set of expectations.

The Westinghouse-Ohio University study of the effects of Headstart have been debated in our field. This study showed little effect on the child's tested ability or intelligence as a result of enrollment in a Headstart program. While many college-based programs for disadvantaged children show dramatic changes in test scores, often ever the effects of these programs fade in time. If the picture of public schools drawn by its critics is a valid one, they could we expect otherwise.

The final issue I must raise with you today relates to our responsibility as educators. Many of us were moved to work with the disadvantaged as a way of helping to achieve social justice. If we find these programs supporting the continued denial of social justice, then what must be our role?